

Dr. Alfred Sommer ANDREW F. HOLMES DEAN OF
MEDICINE DISTINCTION LECTURES



Dr. Alfred Sommer, MD, MHS

Professor of Epidemiology and International Health at the
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Professor of Ophthalmology at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

Dean Emeritus of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Winner of numerous awards, including the Albert Lasker Award for Clinical Research,
the Laureate Award of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the Helmut Horten
Medical Research Award, the Warren Alpert Foundation Prize and the
Prince Mahidol Award from His Majesty the King of Thailand

Past chair of scientific and advisory committees of the National Institutes of Health,
the World Health Organization, UNICEF, World Economic Forum,
and the American Academy of Ophthalmology

Title

An Ophthalmologist Takes a Wrong Turn: Vitamin A, Blindness, and Child Survival

When

Monday, May 27, 2019
4:30 to 6:00 p.m.

Where

McGill Faculty Club
3450 McTavish Street
Montreal, QC

Alfred Sommer, MD, MHS

Dr. Sommer is an inaugural Johns Hopkins University Gilman Scholar, a Johns Hopkins University Distinguished Service Professor, and Dean Emeritus of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. He is a Professor of Epidemiology and International Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Professor of Ophthalmology at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. He served as Dean of the Bloomberg School from 1990-2005.

Sommer received his Medical Doctorate from Harvard Medical School (1967) and his Master of Health Science in Epidemiology from the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health (1973).

His research interests include outcomes assessment; blindness prevention strategies; child survival; and the growing interface between medicine and public health.

His pioneering work in studying vitamin A deficiency has helped save millions of children's lives and eyesight. During a series of complex studies conducted in Indonesia beginning in the mid-1970s, Dr. Sommer and his research team discovered that vitamin A deficiency was far more common than previously recognized. They also found that children with even mild vitamin A deficiency were at a greater risk of death and blindness, primarily because this deficiency decreases resistance to infectious diseases such as measles. Dr. Sommer further observed that acute therapy with vitamin A, given to children with measles, a life-threatening infection in developing countries, reduced their risk of blindness and death by 50 percent.

Putting science into practice, and despite intense skepticism among his peers, Dr. Sommer demonstrated that the debilitating consequences of vitamin A deficiency could be quickly, effectively, and inexpensively prevented with oral high-dose vitamin A supplementation twice a year. As a result, the World Development Report (World Bank) declared this treatment one of the most cost-effective of all health interventions. The WHO, UNICEF, and their partners now provide annually more than half a billion vitamin A supplements to children globally, saving hundreds of thousands of lives each year.

Sommer has published 6 books and over 300 scientific articles and has chaired scientific and advisory committees of the National Institutes of Health, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, World Economic Forum, and the American Academy of Ophthalmology.

He has received numerous awards, including the *Albert Lasker Award for Clinical Research*; the *Pollin Prize for Pediatric Research*; The Laureate Award of the American Academy of Ophthalmology; the *Helmut Horten Medical Research Award*; the *Charles A. Dana Award for Pioneering Achievements in Health*; the *Prince Mahidol Award* (from His Majesty the King of Thailand); the *Dan David Award* (Tel Aviv University); the *Warren Alpert Foundation Prize*; the *Joseph E. Smadel Award* of the Infectious Diseases Society of America; the *Danone International Prize for Nutrition*; the *Lucien Howe Medal* of the American Ophthalmological Society; the *Thomas Francis Medal* of the University of Michigan; and the *Duke Elder International Gold Medal for Contributions to Ophthalmology*.

He has delivered over 70 named lectureships, including the Jackson Memorial Lecture (American Academy of Ophthalmology), Duke Elder Oration (Royal College of Ophthalmologists), De Schweinitz Lecture (College of Physicians, Philadelphia), Dohlman Professor Lecture (Harvard Medical School), Doyne Lecture (Oxford Ophthalmologic Congress), and the Kimura Lecture (University of California, San Francisco), among others.

Sommer is a member of both the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Medicine (formerly Institute of Medicine), is Past President of the Association of Schools of Public Health, is Chair of Johns Hopkins Medicine International, is member and past Chair of the Board of the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation, member of the Bloomberg Family Foundation Board of Directors, and holds the 19th Chair of the Academia Ophthalmologica Internationalis.